

JEFFERSON THE ARCHITECT

by

FISKE KIMBALL

120.92

Lilly
E
332
.K563

DUKE
UNIVERSITY



WOMAN'S COLLEGE
LIBRARY



*George Washington Flowers
Memorial Collection*

DUKE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

ESTABLISHED BY THE
FAMILY OF
COLONEL FLOWERS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
Duke University Libraries

<https://archive.org/details/jeffersonarchite01kimb>

JEFFERSON THE ARCHITECT

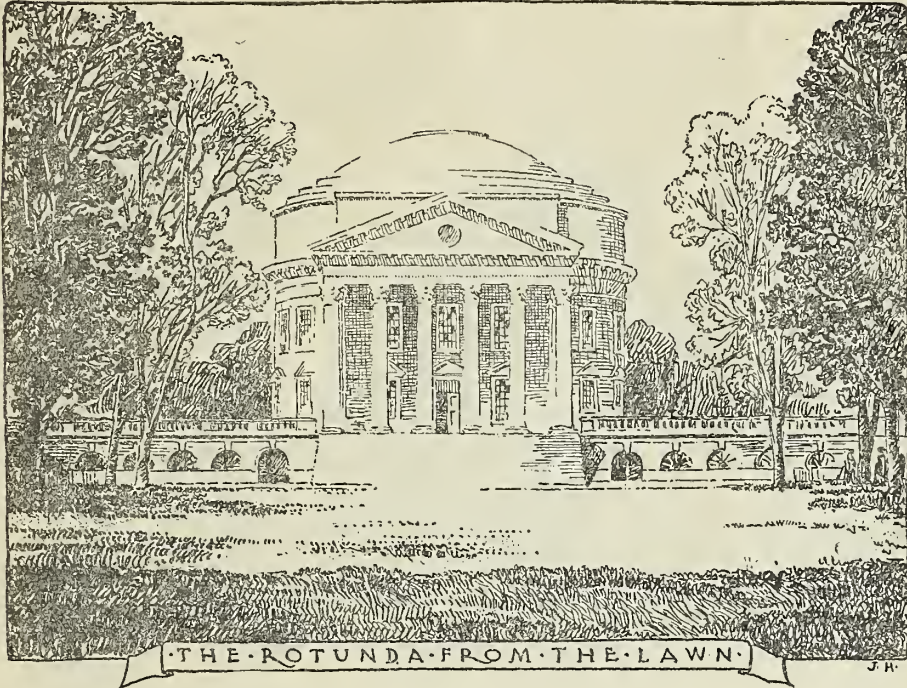
BY FISKE KIMBALL

With Pen Drawings by Joseph Hudnut



MONTICELLO

The Home of Thomas Jefferson. Built by him on the Mountaintop Overlooking Charlottesville, Virginia. Now a National Memorial to the Author of the Declaration of Independence and a Patriotic Shrine for the Children of America. Thomas Jefferson Lived at Monticello for Over Fifty Years While He Served His Country. There He Died and Now Lies Buried. Monticello Is Open to the Public Sundays and Week-days Throughout the Year. Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, National Headquarters, 115 Broadway, New York.



JEFFERSON THE ARCHITECT

FISKE KIMBALL

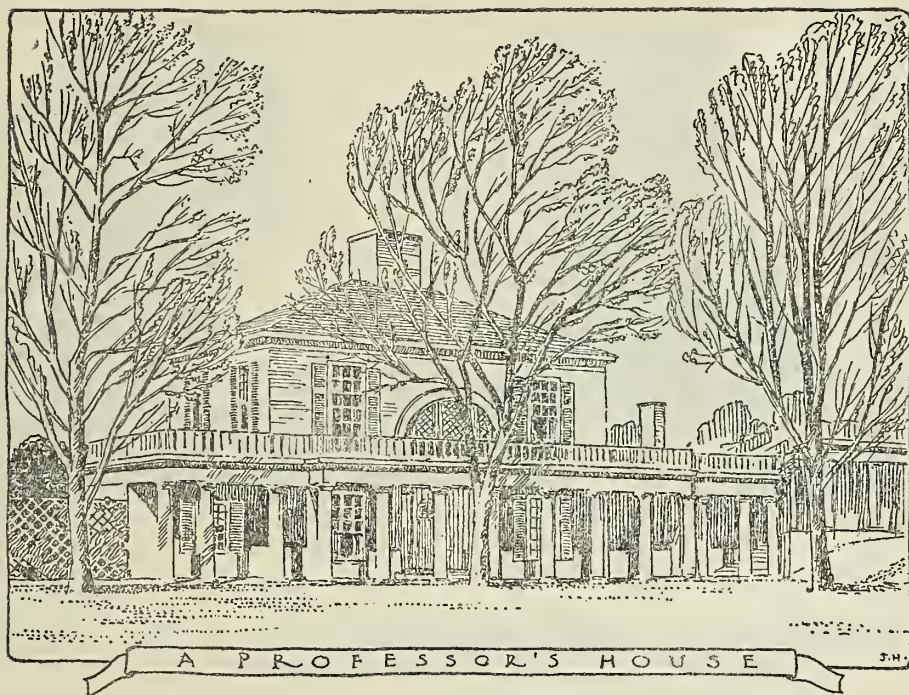
Pen Drawings by Joseph Hudnut

IN spite of Princeton with its English Gothic college, in spite of the lovely Harkness quadrangle at Yale, the most beautiful of American universities is yet, as it has been from its first building a hundred years ago, the University of Virginia. Southerners everywhere to this day call it simply "The University", as in the days when Yale and Princeton were still "colleges". Although other institutions have long adopted its epochal reforms in education, artistically this use of the definite article remains justified. Ordered, calm, and serene, still subject in its growth

to the singleness of conception of its great founder and designer, Thomas Jefferson, it puts to shame the haphazard jumble of buildings and styles elsewhere, and stirs our blood with a magic rarely felt on this side of the water.

"I consider the common plan followed in this country but in none of the others, of making one large and expensive building, as unfortunately erroneous," wrote Jefferson in 1810. "It is infinitely better to erect a small and separate lodge for each separate professorship, with only a hall below for his class, and two chambers above



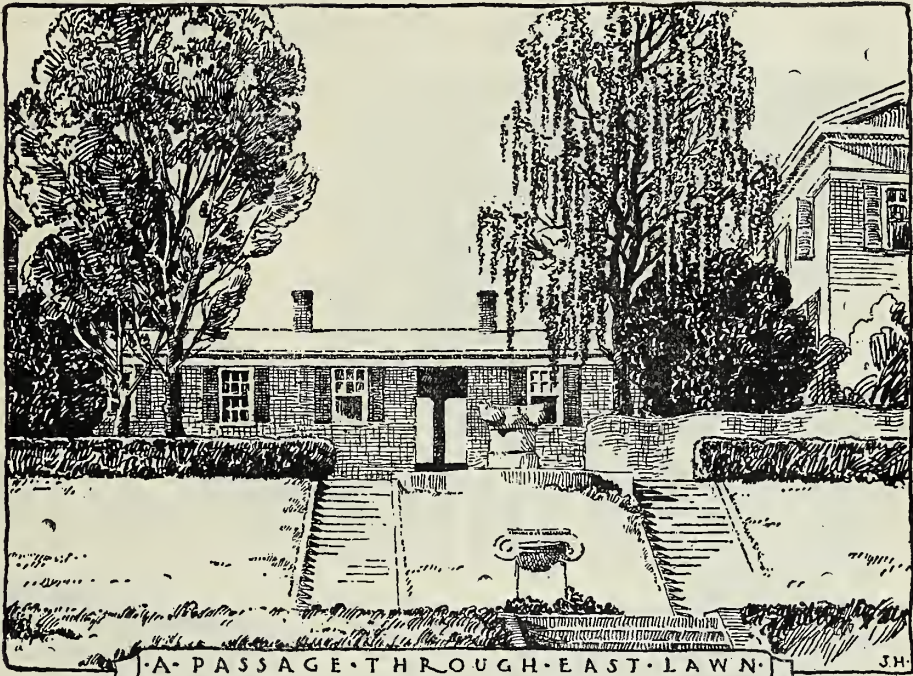


for himself; joining these lodges by barracks for a certain portion of the students, opening into a covered way to give a dry communication between all the schools. The whole of these arranged around an open square of grass or trees would make it, what it should be in fact, an academical village." The University of Virginia is his embodiment of this new ideal.

The heart of the University is the old lawn. Up and down either side are the tall, storied porticoes of the temple-like "pavilions", which once housed the classes of the ten schools or departments, as well as their heads. Between these, fronting the low dormitories, are long white rows of colonnades. At the head, on the highest ground, stands the Rotunda, circular, like the Roman Pantheon, with its dome and lofty, spacious Corinthian porch. It is, in Jefferson's words, the perfect model of "spherical

architecture", as the temples beside it are of the "cubical". Beyond the lawn colonnades, facing outward, are second rows of dormitories, the "ranges" with their red arches. Between lawn and ranges are the walled gardens of the professors, islands of peace in the turmoil of student life. Along the lanes between them run the famous serpentine walls, only a single brick in thickness, buttressed by their own arching action, and making sunny bays for flowers.

A single impress of form unites all these elements into an overwhelming aesthetic effect. The grandiose symmetry of disposition, the rhythmic alternation of pavilion and colonnade, the jewel-like simplicity of the major units, square-faceted and round, with their contrast like diamond and pearl, the eternal recurrence of the white columns, as a rhythmic treble against the ground-bass of red walls are ele-



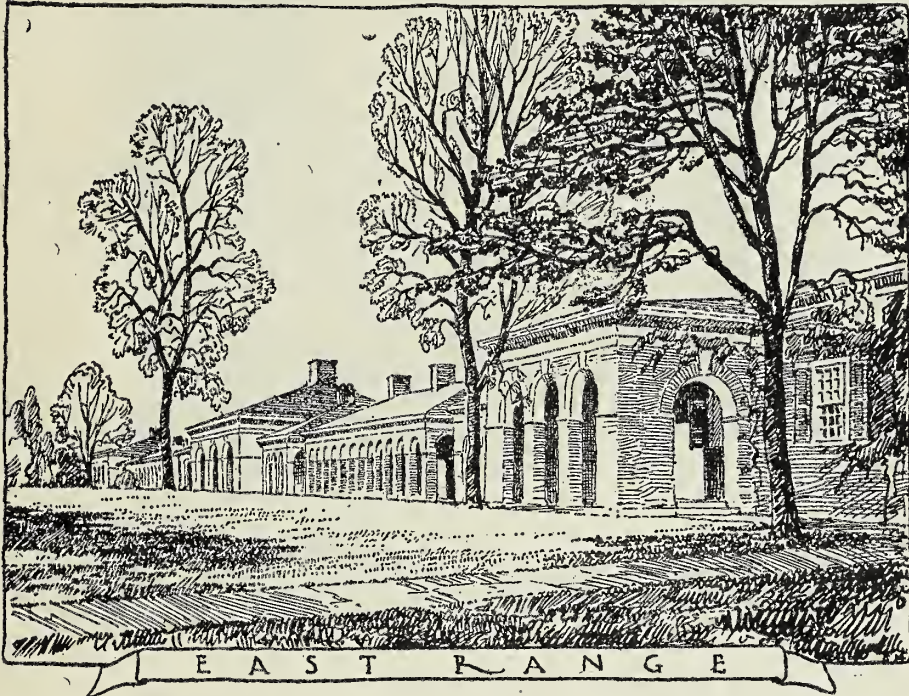
A PASSAGE THROUGH EAST LAWN

ments of this effect, which in its perfection surpasses analysis, and tells us we are in presence of the supreme work of a great personality and great artist.

To endow his creation with this beauty Jefferson had to contend with enemies and friends alike. Opponents attacked the "meretricious ornament", and a devoted colleague spoke of the group with misgiving as a "rare show of architecture". Others were overborne by the sheer force of the artistic impression. George Ticknor, a New Englander with years of travel in Europe, wrote: "It has cost \$250,000 and the perfect finish of every part of it and the beautiful architecture of the whole show, I think, that it has not cost too much. . . . They have, to begin it, a mass of buildings more beautiful than anything architectural in New England, and more appropriate to a university

than can be found, perhaps, in the world." Jefferson was informed by a profound sense of the educational and material value of beauty when he wrote in scorn, "Had we built a barn for a college and log huts for accommodations, should we ever have had the assurance to propose to a European professor of the first order? We owed it to do, not what was to perish with ourselves, but what would remain to be respected and preserved through other ages." Time has justified his foresight and courage.

Such a design for a University was then unique; it was exclusively Jefferson's idea, as contemporary architects were quick to acknowledge. In recent years there have been attempts to credit the idea to others. With the ever-increasing recognition of the merits of the design, and the recurrent skepticism that Jefferson himself could be responsible for it, fresh

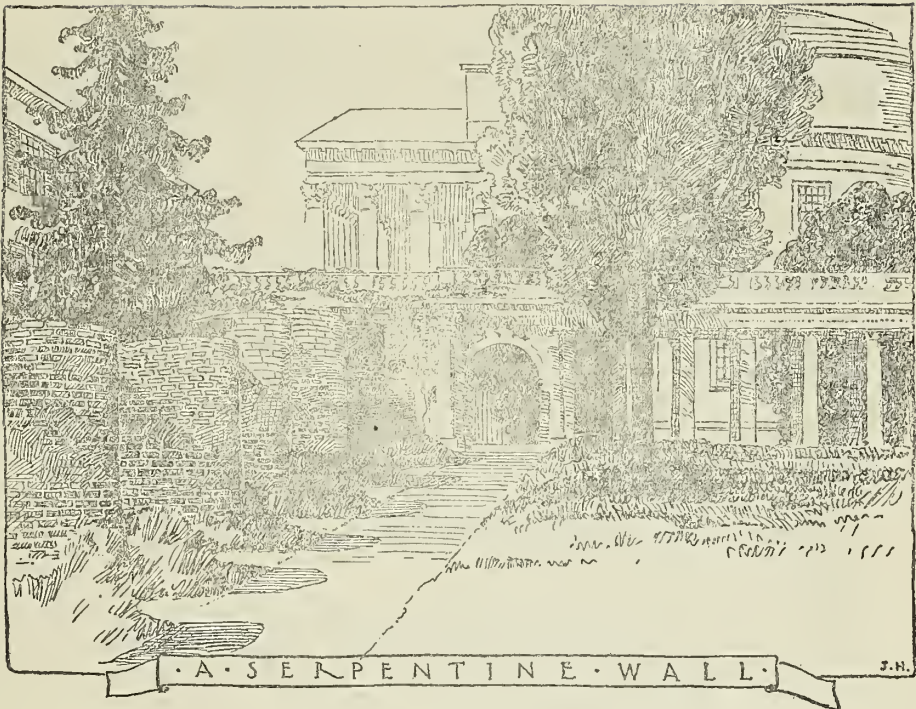


theories are always being put forward to account for its origin. Thus it has been maintained that Jefferson derived it from the "Essay on a System of National Education" by the Reverend Samuel Knox. When, however, one comes to examine with open mind the proposals of Knox, — a series of concentric squares, facing inward, with a tower in the centre, — the resemblance seems insignificant compared with the fundamental differences.

Another suggestion has been that Jefferson based his design on a French plan by the architect Guennepin which was awarded the Prix de Rome in 1805. This shows a coöperative group for six families with separate houses for each, three on a side, common facilities in a building at the head, and communications under cover. Here the resemblance is striking, but the deduction from it mis-

taken. We know exactly what books Jefferson had, even what books he borrowed. The volume of Grands Prix was not among them. Had he copied from Guennepin's, his first sketches would have shown the relation. On the contrary, they are the least like it, and the successive steps by which the final design was reached were taken for known reasons, quite independently.

If one must seek a prototype for the University of Virginia group as it finally took form there is a far more famous example of such a grouping: Marly-le-Roi, which Jefferson had visited on September 7, 1786. Here, since destroyed by the Revolution, was a group long in existence, rivaling Versailles itself in reputation, with the same fundamental composition, the individual pavilions for courtiers grouped in two lines leading up to the casino of the king. It is possible



that a belated reminiscence of Marly, as the great exemplar of the type, helped to determine Jefferson's ultimate plan. Primarily, however, it resulted from the power to analyze the problem in hand, which Jefferson, our first Paris-trained architect, acquired there quite as much as Guenepin, or as the most recent student returning from the Beaux-Arts.

The individual pavilions are, as Jefferson proposed, "models of taste and good architecture, and of a variety of appearance, no two alike, so as to serve as specimens of orders for the architectural lectures." Although he asked of his friends Thornton and Latrobe, the architects of the Capitol, suggestions for varying the fronts, and followed their proposals in three of them, the prevailing type, that of the temple, was his own. With his own hands, stiffened from age and

former fractures, he made all the drawings for the workmen. The "specimens of orders" were taken from the famous antique buildings which Jefferson most admired, and from the designs of Palladio, his guide among modern architects: Doric of the Baths of Diocletian, Doric of the Theatre of Marcellus, Doric of Albano; Ionic of Fortuna Virilis and of the Theatre of Marcellus, Corinthian of Diocletian's Baths Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian of Palladio. Some of these names became the familiar designations of the buildings, — old Professor Minor dwelt in the Theatre of Marcellus, and so on!

Knowing how much Jefferson depended on Palladio, and that he had owned the fine English edition of 1742 by Leoni, the late Thomas Nelson Page gave a copy of this to the University, in which he wrote that it was

the work from which Jefferson had taken his details for the college buildings. This might have been true for Monticello and his earlier buildings, but it is not true for the University. The volume does not show most of the Roman examples Jefferson used, and besides, he no longer owned it. It had gone to Washington in 1814 when the library was purchased as the nucleus of the Library of Congress. Actually the orders were taken from the "Parallel of Ancient Architecture with the Modern" of Fréart de Chambray. A copy of this formed part of the "petit-format library" which Jefferson collected in his later years of financial adversity. Here alone were assembled the "Doric of Albano", and all the others, ancient and modern, just as they were built at Charlottesville.

The new type of grouping which Jefferson established has been followed in many of the most notable American universities. At Stanford, with its connecting arcades, the influence of the University of Virginia is clearly recognizable, in spite of the Spanish details suggested by the old Missions. At New York University and at Columbia, McKim and Stanford White adopted not only the scheme of grouping, with the domed library as a dominant feature, but the monumental Roman style. The designs for Sweetbriar College and many others have a similar ancestry. The scheme for collegiate buildings inaugurated at Virginia has become the characteristic American type.

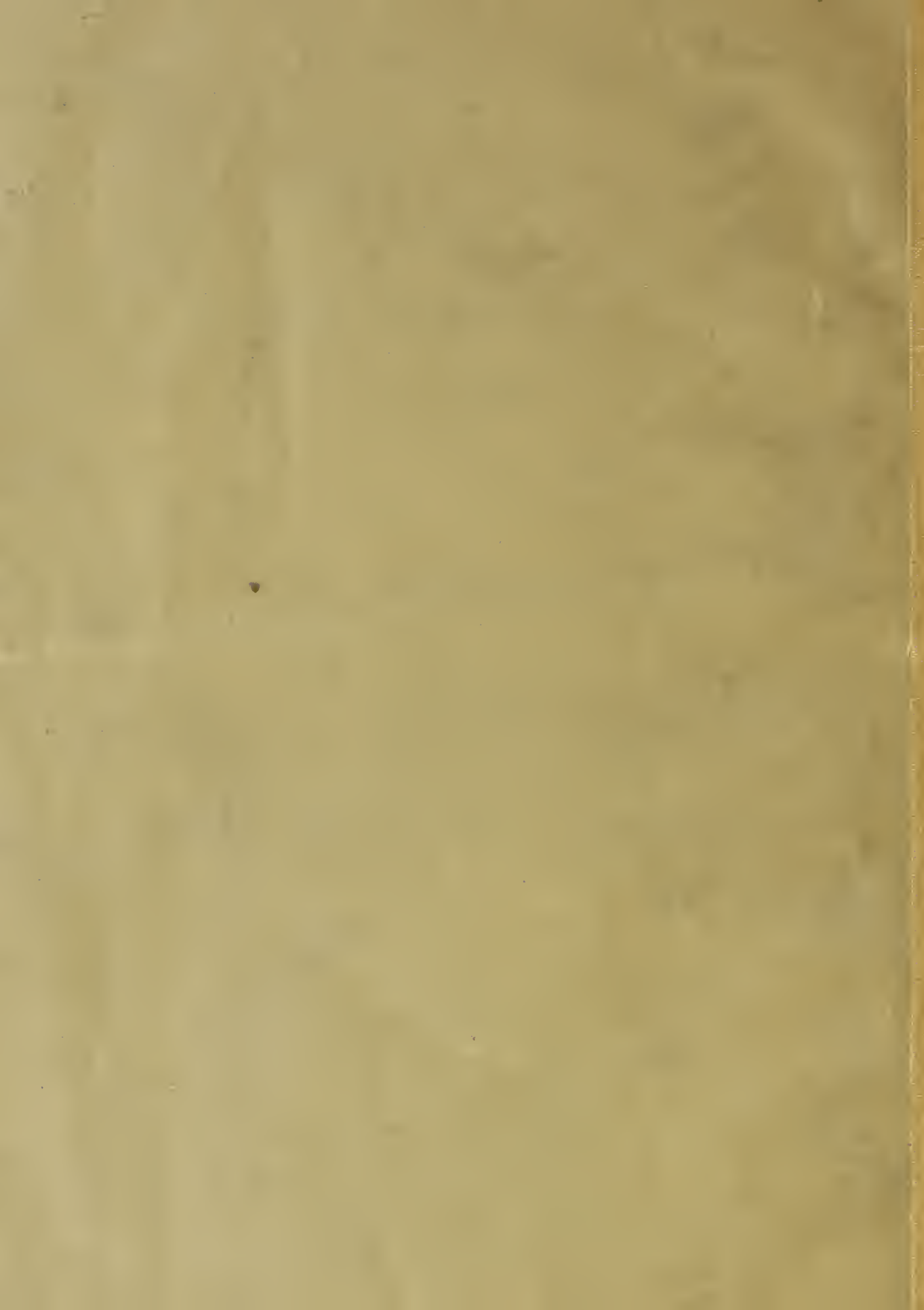
Few college groups came unspoiled through the "dark ages" of Victorianism. The poverty of Reconstruction in the South saved the University of Virginia. Since then the artistic ideals and spirit of Jefferson have again presided, and the new buildings have conformed to them. At the south end

of the lawn are three buildings by Stanford White, not slavishly identical with the old, but beautifully harmonious. To the north of the Rotunda is a superb terraced approach. North, east, and west are the beginnings of further groups in the same style and materials.

It is a tradition that the lawn should first be seen by moonlight, — the white porticoes and colonnades bathed in pale glow, flecked with the shadows of great trees. Beneath the pergolas at its foot the valley lies in peaceful mystery; Monticello mountain rises in silhouette against the bright eastern sky. It is hard to choose between these glories of a summer night and those of other seasons, for the lawn lends itself to the characteristic beauties of each. In winter it is the white of the columns which vies with the dazzling, evanescent snows; in autumn the mellow orange and red of the old brick walls which gives back the glorious palette of the maples, the oaks, the chestnuts.

Perhaps, of all, spring is the loveliest. In the Piedmont, every tree seems to bloom in turn. One by one comes the delicate pink of peach trees still bare of leaves, the white of cherry and pear sweeping over the visible surrounding mountain sides, the great pearly sprays of dogwood amid the budding green, the redbud blazing in the ravines. The yellow broom, the laurel and azalea spread underneath. Wisteria runs its violet clusters along the Ranges; the trumpet vine blends its flowers with the glowing walls; the paulonia, much at home, drops its purple blossoms, the locust fills all the air with heavy scent. When May is in the air, we who know her, whether from South or North, feel the overwhelming force of her attraction, and join in the haunting chorus of "Carry me back — to old Virginia."





Gaylord
PAMPHLET BINDER
Syracuse, N. Y.
Stockton, Calif.

Duke University Libraries



D01093036M

